United Nations S/PV.5481

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5481st meeting

Friday, 30 June 2006, 3.25 p.m.

New York

President:	Ms. Løj	(Denmark)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Greece	Mrs. Papadopoulou
	Japan	Mr. Kitaoka
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Bader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/458)

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/462)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-41366 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/458)

Letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/462)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Algeria, Austria, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Morocco, Norway, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and Zimbabwe in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Carmon (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 30 June 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/465, and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Friday, 30 June 2006, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to take a seat at the Council table.

I should also like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 30 June 2006 from the representative of Senegal which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Senegal to the United Nations, be invited, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, under rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council."

In accordance with past practice in this matter, I propose that the Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Paul Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

The Security Council is meeting in response to the requests contained in letters dated 29 June 2006

from the Permanent Representatives of Algeria and Qatar addressed to the President of the Security Council, documents S/2006/458 and S/2006/462, respectively.

I wish to draw the attention of the members to the following documents: S/2006/436 and S/2006/463, letters dated 26 and 29 June 2006, respectively, from Israel addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/2006/459, letter dated 29 June 2006 from the Syrian Arab Republic addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/2006/443 and S/2006/460, letters dated 28 and 29 June 2006, respectively, from Palestine addressed to the President of the Security Council.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I now give her the floor.

Ms. Kane: At approximately 5 o'clock in the morning on Sunday 25 June, eight Palestinian militants left the southern Gaza Strip via a tunnel and infiltrated an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) base near the Kerem Shalom Kibbutz. The militants fired several anti-tank rockets into the IDF base and a gun battle took place. Corporal Gilad Shalit, an IDF soldier also holding French nationality, was taken hostage and is now being held by militants in Gaza. Two IDF soldiers were killed and a further three wounded. Two Palestinian militants were killed in the operation.

Three Palestinian militant groups — the Nasser Salah el-Din Troops of the Popular Resistance Committees; the Izz el-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the Hamas military wing; and the newly formed Islamic Army — issued a statement confirming that they had conducted the operation and were holding the soldier. They subsequently stated that he would not be released and that information on his state of health would not be provided before Israel releases all Palestinian female and under-age detainees.

The Palestinian Authority spokesman called upon those who abducted the Israeli soldier to guarantee his safety. President Abbas called for the release of the soldier. He met with Prime Minister Haniyeh and contacted international counterparts. Prime Minister Olmert ruled out negotiations over any exchange of prisoners. The Israeli cabinet agreed that the Palestinian Authority would bear full responsibility for any harm to Corporal Shalit and approved recommendations to prepare and deploy Israeli forces for urgent military action.

International efforts to secure the peaceful release of the soldier, especially by Egypt and reportedly by France and Jordan, have been continuous. The Secretary-General has been in frequent touch with parties in the region, including Prime Minister Olmert, President Abbas and President Al-Assad of Syria. He is also consulting individually with his Quartet partners.

The Israeli military operation to obtain the release of Corporal Shalit began just after midnight on 28 June. The operations began with the destruction by F-16 aircraft of two bridges in central Gaza. The IDF then struck Gaza's only power station from the air and ground forces moved into the Gaza Strip. Israeli tanks and armoured personnel carriers moved into the airport, located at the south-eastern end of the Strip. Israeli military aircraft broke the sound barrier over Gaza, causing sonic booms. On the same day, four Israeli Air Force fighter jets overflew Syrian territory, breaking the sound barrier over a presidential villa in Lattakia.

There was a further air strike on the afternoon of Wednesday 28 June on a largely disused training camp in the south of the Gaza Strip. Another Israeli incursion into Gaza took place on the early morning of Thursday 29 June. The Israeli Air Force shelled an open area in the compound of the Islamic University in Gaza and Israeli tanks entered northern Gaza. On the afternoon of 29 June, the Israeli Air Force attacked a car in the Gaza Strip. Its occupants escaped.

On 25 June, an 18-year old Israeli from the West Bank settlement of Itamar was abducted by Palestinian militants as he was hitchhiking. His body was found in Ramallah on the morning of Thursday 29 June. The Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees claimed responsibility for his abduction and killing.

In a military briefing on 29 June, an IDF spokesperson stated that the ongoing operation was aimed at halting rocket attacks on Israel from northern Gaza, in addition to securing the release of the missing soldier. Between 25 and 30 June, Palestinian militants reportedly fired 17 rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, including 11 on 29 June alone. There were no reported casualties.

Also on the night of 29 June, Israeli forces undertook a large-scale arrest raid in the West Bank and Jerusalem, detaining 64 Palestinian Authority officials, including eight ministers and 21 Palestinian Legislative Council members, and 23 suspected militants. The Israeli Attorney General has said that those arrested will be charged under anti-terrorism legislation.

Violence continued last night as the IDF reportedly conducted several operations in the Gaza Strip, including a reported 30 air strikes, as well as in the West Bank. The Ministry of the Interior in Gaza was targeted by an aerial strike and sustained major damage. Two militants from the Al-Aqsa Brigades — the Fatah military wing — were reportedly killed earlier today in Nablus by Israeli military forces, and one Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant died following an air strike in Rafah. No other Palestinian deaths have been reported.

The air attack on the power station on Wednesday destroyed six transformers and the switchyard. The power station cannot transmit, so over 40 per cent of Gaza is now without power. Water pipes were also damaged in the attack and approximately 130,000 people have been without water. Most hospitals possess generators and are continuing to function, and there are sufficient food supplies to last two to three weeks. The crossing points between the Gaza Strip and Israel have been closed since the beginning of the IDF operation, however, so supplies of food and medicine will decrease to critical levels unless those crossings are opened shortly.

The private pipeline that brings fuel from Israel into the Gaza Strip has not been functioning for the past five days. Unless the flow of fuel is restored, supplies are expected to run out this Sunday, 2 July. The humanitarian consequences of a failure of sanitation systems and private generators would be severe, especially given the hot weather. International efforts are under way to restore the flow of fuel into the Gaza Strip.

This is a grave crisis. The slightest turn of events could easily set off another full-scale conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, bringing greater dangers to civilians and having serious regional repercussions. All parties must recognize that, and act with wisdom and care and in full conformity with international humanitarian law. Nothing justifies the holding of hostages. Corporal Gilad Shalit must be released. Nothing justifies indiscriminate rocket attacks. The Palestinian Authority must act to stop them. However, Palestinian civilians should not pay the price of those actions. Israel must cease the destruction of civilian infrastructure, ensure that civilians are protected and allow for humanitarian assistance to get where it needs to go. We are also extremely concerned at the arrest of a large section of the elected Palestinian Government.

All concerned parties must step back from the brink and give dialogue a chance to avert a full-scale confrontation that will only lock Israelis and Palestinians in deeper and deadlier conflict.

The President: I thank Ms. Kane for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Just two days ago, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs addressed the Security Council and reaffirmed the responsibility of the international community, under the relevant rules and provisions of international law, to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In that regard, he stated that

> "There are too many times when we still do not come to the defence of civilian populations in need. When our response is weak, we appear to wash our hands of our humanitarian responsibilities to protect lives. The world is ... a safer place for most of us, but it is still a death trap for too many defenceless civilians — men, women and children. (*S/PV.5476, p. 2*)

For the Palestinian civilian population being held captive under Israel's belligerent military occupation, such a statement tragically and precisely describes the situation of that people over the 39 years since Israel occupied the Palestinian territory in 1967, up until today. The occupying Power has been systematically and egregiously violating international law, particularly the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to which it is bound.

The images of the thousands of innocent and defenceless Palestinian civilians murdered by the Israeli occupying forces are indelibly etched in our memories, including those children, women and men killed in recent weeks by the barrage of Israeli missiles that have rained down on the Gaza Strip. In the month

of June alone, the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the occupying Power against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip has made death, mourning and grief a near-daily ritual, as it has resulted in the killing of several members of the same families, has left numerous children motherless and fatherless, has deprived mothers and fathers of their young children and babies and has maimed and wounded thousands of others. For the Palestinian people, the protection of their human lives — to which they are entitled under international law, just like all other civilians in situations of armed conflict — remains elusive, as the international community has remained passive about their plight, leaving them to continue suffering more loss, misery and hardship at the mercy of their occupier.

The list of flagrant violations and grave breaches of international law — war crimes — that have been and are being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is endless. The list of pretexts used by the occupying Power for its continuing systematic violations and crimes is endless as well –including, for example, having no partner for peace, so-called security concerns and, now, the capture of a soldier of the occupying forces.

Yet such pretexts ring hollow when the situation is accurately examined. What we are witnessing today in the occupied Palestinian territory — the blatant military aggression by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian people and their leadership, and the collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population — is clearly rooted in the long history of Israel's brutalization, humiliation and dehumanization of the Palestinian people for the purpose of furthering Israel's malicious agenda against the occupied territory and its people, specifically including its insatiable desire to acquire land through its colonial settlement campaign and the construction of the wall.

The scope and scale of the recent military assaults and the wanton destruction being carried out by the Israeli occupying forces in the Gaza Strip indicate that this flagrant military aggression against the Palestinian population under occupation was clearly premeditated and planned. Indeed, well prior to the capture of the Israeli soldier on 25 June from a military outpost on the Gaza border, Israel, the occupying Power, had issued a series of threats and declarations about its intention to launch a major invasion of the Gaza Strip and had begun to mobilize its troops. The soldier's capture became the spark, or the pretext, for the actual launching of the invasion.

Two days ago, on 28 June, Israel, the occupying Power, after amassing thousands of troops along the southern border of the Gaza Strip, near the Rafah area, launched a major air and ground military assault on the Gaza Strip, using warplanes, tank artillery, bombardment and shelling from naval units. That assault is threatening the lives of the defenceless Palestinian civilian population in the area, causing wanton destruction of civilian property and infrastructure and further destabilizing the fragile situation on the ground. Collectively punishing and terrorizing the Palestinian civilian population, the Israeli occupying forces have bombed and destroyed Gaza's only power station, leaving the majority of the population without electricity.

The occupying forces have also bombed major water pipelines — making clean water even more scarce — and have destroyed three bridges in Gaza, severely undermining movement throughout the area. In addition, the occupying forces have been flying warplanes over civilian neighbourhoods throughout day and night, causing sonic booms intended to cause fear and panic among the population. They have bulldozed large tracts of agricultural land, bombed a soccer field and launched missile strikes against official Palestinian Government institutions, including the Ministry of Interior in Gaza.

Hundreds of Palestinians, particularly from the Rafah area, have fled their homes in search of safety in a place where nowhere seems to be safe from Israel's military onslaught, which is expected to expand, as Israel has now deployed thousands more troops along the northern border of Gaza, threatening to invade Palestinian towns and refugee camps in the north. The Palestinian civilian population in the devastated and impoverished Gaza Strip is now under complete siege, as Israel has also sealed all border crossings, and — with the deprivation of electricity and clean water, including for hospitals, and intensifying shortages of food and medical supplies — the dire humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip is being severely exacerbated. In this regard, it should be noted that the International Committee of the Red Cross, among others, has today expressed its deep concern regarding Israel's military

escalation in the Gaza Strip and has called upon Israel, in accordance with its obligations under international law, to allow for the delivery of urgent medical supplies to Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip to alleviate this grave humanitarian crisis.

Following the launch of this invasion on Wednesday, the Israeli occupying forces yesterday expanded their aggression into the West Bank, carrying out a series of raids and the kidnapping and detention of at least 64 Palestinians, the majority of them high-ranking, democratically elected officials, including eight cabinet ministers of the Palestinian Authority, 24 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and several mayors. Those officials, in addition to the more than 9,000 other Palestinians, including women and children, imprisoned in Israeli jails, are being held by the occupying Power in blatant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Moreover, the direct targeting by Israel of senior Palestinian officials in such an operation is a clear indication that all of this is being done for political objectives: it is intended to sabotage the recent agreement achieved among Palestinian parties for reconciliation and unity, and is also intended not only to severely hamper the functioning of the Palestinian Authority, but ultimately to cause the complete collapse of the Authority as a whole, thus clearing the way for Israel to continue with its unlawful unilateral measures and plans, on the pretext of having "no partner for peace".

Indeed, this recent Israeli military campaign was coincidentally launched on the eve of the agreement reached among Palestinian parties directly aimed at opening the door for a resumption of negotiations and the peace process. The continuation and the expected expansion of Israeli military aggression will surely pre-empt any such resumption, thus killing the prospects for negotiations between the two sides aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement, based on the two-State solution, and the occupying Power will thus achieve its objective of leaving no option except unilateralism.

And yet, despite the relentless Israeli onslaught and the incessant crimes and State terror being committed against the Palestinian people, the Palestinian leadership continues to choose the diplomatic option. Under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian side is sparing no effort to resolve the issue of the Israel soldier taken prisoner, to make sure that he is treated in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law and to secure his release unharmed. Such efforts have been exerted simultaneously with the efforts exerted to secure agreement among all Palestinian parties for national unity and to promote calm. President Abbas continues to call for diplomacy to be given a chance in order to save many lives on the Palestinian side — and also on the Israeli side — and to save Palestinian civilian infrastructure from even further destruction and avert the further deterioration of this humanitarian tragedy being caused by the crimes of the occupying Power against the Palestinian people. Israel, the occupying Power, should reciprocate such serious efforts by abandoning the military option, which will lead to only more suffering and loss and will further destabilize the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and beyond, in the region as a whole, clearly making this a matter of international peace and security.

It is now the duty of the Security Council, in accordance with its responsibilities under the United Nations Charter, to act in order to address the crisis situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Council cannot continue to remain passive in the face of such military aggression against a defenseless civilian population and the grave breaches of international humanitarian law that are being committed by Israel, the occupying Power. The Council should act by condemning this Israeli aggression and calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities and for compliance with the rules and provisions of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and calling also for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces from within the Gaza Strip and for the release of the Palestinian officials being detained. The Security Council and other concerned parties within the international community must exert the necessary efforts to pressure all parties to move away from aggression and back towards the resumption of negotiations and the peace process.

Failure by the Council to take the measures required to bring a halt to this most recent Israeli aggression and a halt to the collective punishment and human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people will surely only further bolster the occupying Power's impunity and perpetuate the cycle of violence reignited by Israel, worsening the humanitarian conditions and civilian suffering in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East

Jerusalem, and taking us all even further away from the realization of the peace so desperately yearned for. Moreover, as we stated last week before the Council during its important debate on strengthening international law (see S/PV.5474), the repeated inability of the Council to act with regard to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has not only aggravated and prolonged the conflict, but has resulted in the questioning of the strength of international law and of the credibility of the Council in its fair implementation of international law.

We reiterate today that it is not too late for the Security Council to assert its rightful and proper role and to use its authority to address this issue through appropriate measures aimed at bringing an end to the grave breaches being committed, bringing an end to the hostilities and salvaging the prospects for reaching a peaceful settlement on the basis of international law, United Nations resolutions, the Quartet road map and the Arab peace initiative. We affirm our belief in the authority and the ability of the Security Council and in the primacy and legitimacy of international law, and once more convey to the members of the Council our strong hope — the hope of the Palestinian people and their leadership — that the Council will uphold its duties and responsibilities and will thus spare us all from the tragedy of even more loss and suffering.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Carmon (Israel): At the outset, Madam President, I would like to congratulate on your leadership of the Council for the month of June. We know that it has been an eventful and complicated month, and your able stewardship has been much appreciated.

Allow me to share the facts concerning the latest developments on the ground. On Sunday, 25 June, at approximately 5.30 a.m., members of Hamas, along with its partner terror organizations, infiltrated Israel near the Kerem Shalom border crossing with the Gaza Strip, through a deep tunnel dug 300 metres into Israeli territory. During the ensuing attack, Palestinian terrorists killed two Israeli soldiers, First Lieutenant Hanan Barak, age 20, and Staff Sergeant Pavel Slutzker, also age 20. They kidnapped one soldier, Corporal Gilad Shalit, age 19, and wounded three others. The terrorist organizations Hamas, the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) and Jaish al-Islam — the Army of Islam — took responsibility for the attack. The last of these organizations is a new, previously unknown terror group.

Gilad Shalit is currently being held hostage and his whereabouts are not known. On that same day, the PRC kidnapped and subsequently shot and murdered an 18-year old Israeli civilian, Eliyahu Asheri. He was murdered on the day of his abduction and his body was discovered late Wednesday night by Israeli forces.

These Palestinian terrorist attacks were launched after weeks of Israeli restraint in the face of numerous attempted kidnappings and unceasing Kassam rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip that have targeted civilians, schools and homes, traumatized children and paralyzed the city of Sderot.

As the Council will recall, Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip last August with the hope of creating a window of opportunity and re-energizing the peace process. Instead, the response was an actualization of Israel's worry — an increase in terrorist attacks. Gaza is now a terror base, actively supported by the elected Hamas Government. Israel is under attack day in and day out. Terrorists have perpetrated suicide bombings, gunfire shootings, stabbing attacks, Katyusha and Kassam rocket fire, explosions and Molotov cocktail attacks and other forms of terror. Only two weeks ago, two young girls luckily escaped yet another kidnapping attempt. But this is only one example.

One particular form of continuous Palestinian terror has been the barrage of Kassam rockets launched into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip. Since last October, more than 600 Kassam rockets have fallen onto Israeli cities and territory, and in just this past week more than 50 rockets were launched from Gaza. In the city of Sderot, a constant target of Kassam fire, rockets have struck homes, schools and places of work and have injured numerous people, causing shrapnel wounds, shock and trauma. The clear target of these rocket attacks is men, women and children — Israeli civilians.

Madam President, members of the Security Council, what would the mayors and citizens of your respective cities demand of your Governments? How would your respective Governments react to such blatant acts of terrorism?

The aggressive terrorist provocations of the past week and indeed those in recent months have persisted

only because they are supported by the official Palestinian Government, a terrorist regime with a sworn intent to deny us our most fundamental human rights. Hamas is committed to a radical and militant ideology, and continues — even as we are meeting at this moment — to engage in terrorism and reject the very tenets of the peace process.

Hamas declared this month that it is renouncing its ceasefire. Yet its campaign of terror has always been its prime objective. We were not surprised when in fact Hamas broke its ceasefire, engaging in rocket attacks with its partner organizations one week prior to its deceptive declaration. This deception was corroborated only when we learned, this past Sunday, that for months it had been digging a deep tunnel in order to infiltrate Israel.

But Hamas is not alone. The dangerous realities in the Middle East are further inflamed by the active and direct collaboration between Syria, Iran, Hezbollah and Palestinian terror groups, comprising an axis of terror.

The first and foremost obligation of every State is to protect its citizens. Each and every member of this Council and of this Organization understands this responsibility. Alongside maintaining peace, it is the premise of government to protect its citizens. This responsibility is enshrined in the most basic principles of international law.

Israel is deeply concerned about the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit. That is a grave humanitarian issue and, as a Sovereign state, it is our duty to do all that we can to bring about his safe return.

From the moment initial reports of Gilad's kidnapping were received, Israel spared no effort in exploring and exhausting all diplomatic channels and, in particular, gave Chairman Abbas every opportunity to secure his safe release, which can be seen as a test of his leadership. Even in Damascus — where Khaled Meshaal, a leader of Hamas, keeps his headquarters and liaises with the Assad regime — many important communications were received in order to influence Corporal Shalit's safe return. Indeed, many leaders in our region agree that Meshaal is the key to resolving this humanitarian crisis.

Nevertheless, the diplomatic efforts have so far been fruitless. With the passing of each hour, the threat to the life and well-being of Gilad has intensified and the urgency of ending this crisis is becoming even greater. May I remind Council members of the outcome of similar cases, in Israel and in other countries, where soldiers, journalists, humanitarian workers and civilians were kidnapped, brutally tortured, slaughtered and beheaded.

Israel, like any other responsible Government, cannot tolerate a situation in which its citizens are being held hostage by members of a terrorist group such as Hamas. Let me assure the Council that we did not disengage from the Gaza Strip in order to return to it. It is not in our moral, security or financial interests or in our interest in any other form. As it now stands, the Israeli army's presence is limited to a very small area in southern Gaza, with the sole aim of preventing Corporal Shalit from being smuggled outside of the Gaza Strip by his terrorist captors. The military operation now taking place is thus specific in nature and limited in scope. Its objective is not punishment or retaliation. Israel is taking every effort to minimize any harm to Palestinian civilians. Indeed, just an hour ago, Defense Minister Amir Peretz declared that Israel is immediately planning to take steps to ease the humanitarian situation on the ground in Gaza.

International terrorism is the largest challenge to global peace and security. In Israel, it remains the greatest obstacle to the safety and security of our citizens. Our duty to confront this threat has guided our efforts since even before Israel's inception.

Our goal with this military endeavour is in line with our legitimate right to live in security. In the light of the escalation of Palestinian terrorism, Israel has decided to intensify its efforts to arrest those operatives responsible for terrorist attacks so they can be tried and brought to justice. Israel will not accept terrorism even if it is hidden behind political titles. The world should recognize those who purposefully and intentionally target innocents as exactly what they are: terrorists. We should not be fooled by their suits and ties. We should rather listen to what they are saying and look at what they are doing.

Sadly, our worst fears about a terrorist organization taking over the Palestinian Authority have now been realized. The world is now witnessing the true colours of Hamas. The grave developments this week reaffirm the importance of the policy that the international community adopted following the recent Palestinian elections, in particular the three core

conditions that it has called on the Palestinian Government to fulfil if it is to be considered a legitimate political partner. It is therefore critical that the international community continue to strictly adhere to this policy. It should not be led astray by any vague Palestinian formulations that fail to demonstrate an unconditional commitment to any of those three stipulations.

We are deeply concerned by the grave turn of recent events in our region. Yet the responsibility for those developments lies squarely on the shoulders of Hamas, which has perpetrated these crimes, and of the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, who has been unable to stop terrorism from emanating from his territory. We urge the international community to continue applying all possible political pressure on the Palestinian Authority and on the Hamas terrorist organization, including its members and sponsors in Damascus, so as to ensure the immediate and safe release of the Gilad Shalit and to finally bring an end to the use of Palestinian territory as a base for terrorist operations. Our common commitment to fighting terrorism and to empowering those who are genuinely committed to peace demands no less.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are strongly urged to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to thank you, Madam, for having convened this emergency meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We would also like to thank Ms. Angela Kane for her briefing to the Council today.

Over the past two days, Israeli military forces have conducted a large-scale military operation involving air bombardment and the use of ground forces, leading to the total destruction of infrastructure. Bridges, universities and power stations were deliberately targeted, paralysing daily life in the Gaza Strip. The Gaza Strip was totally closed to access by air, land and sea, thereby isolating about 1.5 million Palestinians from the outside world and restricting the movement of citizens, leading to the economic strangulation of the Gaza Strip and to grave food shortages.

The Beit Hanoun crossing point, which is used by international relief workers, was also closed, which constitutes an obstacle to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Israeli air force is flying low over the Gaza Strip, breaking the sound barrier and causing sonic booms in an attempt to intimidate and terrorize the civilian population. The occupying Power has detained 64 members of the Legislative Council and Palestinian Government ministers — about one third of the elected Palestinian Government.

The military campaign is by no means proportionate to its declared objective. Rather, it represents the punishment of Palestinian civilians through the destruction of civilian property far removed from military targets and which do not in any way contribute to military activities. Such measures represent acts of collective punishment, which are banned under the terms of article 43 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

These latest practices are but a link in a chain — the Israeli Government's escalation of policies that harm the Palestinian people, including extrajudicial killings and the indiscriminate bombardment of the civilian population. Such irresponsible Israeli practices constitute a grave violation of international treaties, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. They constitute a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. Furthermore, they will only exacerbate the violence in the region and lead to the abandonment of the road map, thereby dealing a severe blow to any chance to bringing about peace in the Middle East, as will the provocative flights being carried out by the Israeli air force in the airspace of a neighbouring Arab State.

It is incumbent upon the international community, represented by the Security Council, which has sole responsibility for international peace and security, to adopt a responsible attitude and put an end to such violations.

Last week, we held an open debate on strengthening international law and the rule of law and preserving international peace and security (see S/PV.5474). This week, we discussed the protection of civilians in armed conflict (see S/PV.5476). We listened to all of the speakers in those debates reaffirm the importance of those two issues. However, today

one Member of the Organization is totally ignoring the initiative whose importance we emphasized only yesterday. This is, indeed, a test of the credibility and determination of the Security Council regarding its commitments in that respect. If the Council does not take firm and robust measures to deal with this situation, its authority in the area of international law and the protection of civilians will be eroded.

The right of Israel to defend the lives and security of its citizens is not in question. However, the life of one soldier should not be counted at the expense of an entire people. If we follow such formulas in international relations, the world will face true catastrophe.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the State of Qatar believes that the peace process must continue and that all parties must renounce violence and respect the resolutions of the international community, notably the commitment to the road map, as proposed by the Quartet, relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab peace initiative.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): The Permanent Representative of Austria will shortly be making a statement on behalf of the European Union, which I fully support. I would like to make a few additional comments.

France is extremely concerned about developments in the situation in the Middle East. While we recognize the legitimate right of Israel to self-defence, we call for the greatest restraint in the Israeli operations under way, in particular to protect the Palestinian civilian population. We reaffirm the pre-eminence of diplomatic paths for obtaining the release of the Israeli soldier. We call for the speediest possible end to Israeli incursions in Gaza and in zone A of the West Bank so as to facilitate the de-escalation of violence in the region.

It is essential that the Palestinian Authority urgently take all necessary measures to halt the firing of missiles and acts of violence of all kinds against Israel and its citizens. Furthermore, we condemn the killing of the young Israeli settler who was kidnapped in the West Bank. We reaffirm that the Hamas-led Palestinian Government must adhere to the three principles laid down by the Quartet: renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of international instruments and obligations. It is also essential, however, to protect the Palestinian Authority as an institution and to guarantee the possibility of future dialogue and negotiation.

The arrest by Israel of members of the Government and the Legislative Council and other Palestinian political leaders is a direct threat to the very existence of Palestinian institutions. We therefore call for their release.

As the Secretary-General has said, it is essential that all the parties urgently take measures with a view to a de-escalation. It is essential to restore the conditions for a resumption of negotiations with a view to a just, equitable and lasting settlement based on law that will enable the Israeli and Palestinian States and peoples to finally live in peace and security.

Mr. Gayama (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation is grateful to you, Madam President, for having organized this public meeting on the current situation in the Middle East. We also thank Ms. Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for the information she brought to our attention.

Once again, urgency compels us to consider an extremely grave situation: that of Palestine. The spark that ignited the conflagration was the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier following a commando operation targeting an Israeli military facility. We may well wonder about the reasons — the real motives — behind that act, or even about its appropriateness in a context as delicate as that of a contentious Israeli-Palestinian situation that is so sensitive to manage — all the more so when we consider that recently, some rather positive developments had eased our minds a bit in that regard.

I am referring to the inter-Palestinian talks between Fatah and Hamas, which had shown some progress, to the point where one could speak of a certain de facto, implicit recognition of Israel by the current Palestinian Government. I am referring also to at least the announcement of a gradual resumption by international partners of financial assistance to the Palestinian authorities. Above all, there was the issue of a return to the road map thanks to the joint efforts of the parties, particularly President Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Egypt and other international partners were associated with those efforts. We commend their goodwill and their readiness to assist.

My country cannot fail to deplore any bellicose attitude, which, in such a context, weakens the chances for peace and law while increasing those for tension

and crisis. Therefore, the kidnapping and holding of the Israeli soldier by the Palestinian groups claiming responsibility is unacceptable. It is an unfortunate act that we cannot in any way encourage.

Israel thus found a pretext for carrying out disproportionate military operations that have had the result of intolerably worsening the ever more precarious lives of the Palestinian people, who today are largely deprived of water and electricity and subjected to true official terrorism.

Previous speakers, including the representatives of Palestine and Qatar, have already described how the actions carried out by the Israeli army are in violation of the relevant international conventions and humanitarian law. Our indignation extends to the arrest and detention of Palestinian officials, ministers and parliamentarians, which mock the Palestinian Authority's legitimate institutions.

At this stage, we should like to appeal to the goodwill of all the parties to continue to give priority to the objectives of peace within the framework of the road map so that the Middle East can commit itself to the path towards a peaceful solution and turn away, once and for all we hope, from violence as a way to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At this stage, that is all we would like to say. We express the hope that the international community, particularly the Security Council, will, to the extent possible, lend its support to the efforts of the individuals and institutions of good will that are prepared to help Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Bolton (United States of America): We are all aware of the seriousness of the situation that is unfolding in the Middle East. Let me state that our first and foremost goal here in the Security Council should be to avoid taking any steps that would unexpectedly exacerbate tensions in the region. To that end, we feel that we should tread cautiously before issuing any remarks, much less a formal statement, given the complexity of the situation. We should not undermine the limited credibility of the Council by engaging in debate and rhetoric merely for their own sake. Such exercises undermine the United Nations generally and provide evidence for those who say it is all talk and no action.

The United States calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Israel Defense Forces Corporal Gilad Shalit by Hamas. That is the best way to achieve our shared goal of a peaceful resolution of the immediate crisis. Terrorism of any kind — which this clearly constitutes — is intolerable, and the international community must stand united in opposing it. The attack and hostage-taking by Hamas last week precipitated this crisis, and their refusal to release their hostage continues to place innocent Palestinians in harm's way. We further condemn the brutal murder of 18-year-old Israeli citizen Eliyahu Asheri, and our condolences go out to his family.

Upon the safe and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit, we are hopeful that the parties in the region can continue discussions about the best way forward to establish a lasting peace. The United States is of the firm view that a prerequisite for ending this conflict is that the Governments of Syria and Iran end their role as State sponsors of terror and unequivocally condemn the actions of Hamas, including this kidnapping.

As we urge for calm in the region, let us remain cognizant of the fact that we would not be where we are right now if it were not for Syria's support and harbouring of terrorists. We call upon President Assad to lend his support to international efforts to resolve the situation. An important first step in that regard would be for Syria to arrest Khaled Meshaal, a known international terrorist and member of Hamas, and to close down the various terrorist headquarters in Damascus. In addition, we call upon Syria to stop financing the terrorists and to stop cooperating with other States, such as Iran, that finance terrorists.

At the same time, it is the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority Government to stop all acts of violence and terror and to comply with the principles enunciated by the Quartet: renounce terror, recognize Israel and accept previous obligations and agreements, including the road map.

We call upon the current leaders of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to fully support and implement these principles set forth by the Quartet. An immediate first step in that regard would be for Hamas to secure the safe and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit.

The G-8 noted yesterday its concern about the detention of elected members of the Palestinian

Authority and legislature. We call on all parties to avoid actions that could escalate this situation or harm innocent civilians, while acknowledging Israel's unequivocal right to defend itself and the lives of its citizens.

During this period of crisis, we urge close attention to the humanitarian needs of the population of Gaza and action to ensure that those needs are met expeditiously.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation): We are grateful to Ms. Kane for her briefing.

The Russian Federation is deeply concerned at the new and dangerous developments that have taken place in the Gaza Strip. The situation in the region, in Palestinian-Israeli relations and, indeed, throughout the entire Middle East region is becoming increasingly serious. Additional urgent action is required to prevent further destabilization, and all parties must show restraint and wisdom and understand what a dangerous point they have reached.

Large-scale operations by the Israeli armed forces in the Gaza Strip can lead to significant losses among the civilian population and seriously complicate prospects of eventually reaching an Israeli-Palestinian settlement.

In order to avoid an escalation in the crisis, the Russian delegation is calling on the leadership of the Palestinian Authority to take decisive measures to curb the extremists and to halt raids by terrorists, attacks on Israeli citizens and Qassam missile attacks against Israeli territory. Most importantly, the captured Israeli soldier must be released.

All Palestinian movements must understand that any deterioration in the situation could only harm the realization of the national aspirations of the Palestinians. Of course, Israel, for its part, must also find a way to bring about stabilization. There is no doubt that Israel has the right and the obligation to protect the life and security of its citizens. However, it cannot do so at the cost of serious consequences for the Palestinian civilian population and through collective punishment of the inhabitants of Gaza and other regions of Palestine.

It is absolutely inadmissible, under the pretext of bringing pressure to bear on extremists, to violate the borders and air space of other countries of the region — in this case, Syria's. We are particularly concerned by Israel's arrest and detention of Palestinian Government ministers and Legislative Council deputies. Those persons received their mandates following independent and democratic elections — that is, in the context of the process of the development of democracy in the region of the Middle East, on whose further deepening there is broad international agreement.

Russia sees only one way out of the existing situation: to halt resistance by force and to achieve a political settlement through negotiations. The only other alternative is the further destabilization of the situation in the region, which would be extremely dangerous and certainly spread.

We are profoundly concerned by the serious humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories; it is only worsening as a result of the latest deterioration of the situation there. We need as soon as possible to begin practical work on the provisional international mechanism approved by the Quartet of leading international mediators and implement the mechanism for giving assistance to the Palestinian people, with the active participation of donors.

We must first and foremost ensure the uninterrupted supply of fuel and medicine to Gaza. Russia, in the course of its contacts with Israelis and Palestinians, will continue its endeavours to induce the parties to abide by the positions agreed upon by the Quartet. That has already been discussed at the meeting of ministers of foreign affairs of the G-8 in Moscow on 29 June, where a corresponding position of solidarity was agreed upon.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): We, too, would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ms. Kane, for her briefing.

Since Slovakia fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union, I will limit my statement to the following remarks.

We are deeply concerned about the recent escalating tensions and the upsurge in violence in Gaza as well as the widespread deterioration in the security situation in the Middle East. We therefore call on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to do everything possible to calm the situation and to prevent

its further dangerous escalation, which could only lead to suffering and the loss of lives.

We urge the Palestinian Authority to undertake all necessary measures and to make every effort to find and release the kidnapped Israeli soldier and prevent further military and terrorist attacks on Israel, notably the launching of rockets against Israeli population centres. We support the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and his efforts to achieve that goal, and we hope that the Palestinian Government will cooperate towards that end.

We also strongly condemn the recent killing of the young Israeli civilian who had been kidnapped. In that regard, we call on the Palestinian Authority to take immediate measures to put an end to acts of terrorist violence and to adhere to the three principles set out by the Quartet.

With respect to Israel, although we believe it has the right of self-defence against terrorism and its perpetrators, and although we understand its anxiety over the well-being of its kidnapped soldier and its desire for his quick and safe release, we stress that Israel's measures and responses must be always proportionate and that everything possible must be done to avoid any loss of innocent life as well as the destruction of civilian infrastructure and to prevent any further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. We also call on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint with regard to flights over Syrian territory.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Middle East conflict based on all relevant Security Council resolutions and on negotiations between the two sides. We urge both sides to return to a constructive dialogue and to take concrete actions aimed at building and strengthening mutual confidence and trust.

In conclusion, I should like to stress once again that there can be no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict is through peaceful negotiations leading to a two-State solution, in accordance with the road map.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): Like others, I am grateful to Assistant Secretary-General Kane for her briefing.

At the outset, I should like to align myself with the statement to be made shortly by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

Like others, the United Kingdom is deeply concerned at the current situation in Gaza, and in particular at the escalation in violence, so we urge both sides to show the utmost restraint. The urgent priority is the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit. That is in everyone's interests.

We condemn the killing of two Israeli soldiers at the weekend and the murder of Eliyahu Asheri, but it is important that Israel abide by international law. It should seek to avoid civilian casualties and any action that adds to the suffering of the Palestinian people. As the G-8 foreign ministers said in Moscow yesterday, "the detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature raises particular concerns". Those detained should be accorded their full legal rights.

Most importantly, politics should be allowed to take hold over violence. Every effort should be made to maximize the chances of finding a diplomatic solution to the present situation. We urge all parties to find a way back to negotiations, which are the best way of ensuring a lasting peace, and to restore calm for the sake of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

We share the concerns expressed about the humanitarian situation and note that Israel is planning immediately to take steps to ease that situation. Restoring electricity and water supplies and access for humanitarian organizations must be a priority.

Given those humanitarian concerns, it might be appropriate to say something now about progress in establishing the temporary international mechanism. We have repeatedly emphasized the wish of the United Kingdom to see help given to the basic needs of the Palestinian people. We are not in the business of punishing Palestinians for the way they voted, but nor are we prepared to put our funds through a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority that has yet to demonstrate commitment to the Quartet's three principles. That is why the United Kingdom has been leading international efforts to find other ways of helping the Palestinians, including through the establishment of the temporary international mechanism.

Following endorsement by the Quartet on 17 June, the European Commission now has teams on

the ground working to set up the mechanism. The Commission is particularly focused on delivering allowances to front-line health workers, and expects to make the first of those payments by the middle of July. The mechanism is already paying some utility bills. The other parts of the mechanism, paying for health supplies and social security payments for the poorest Palestinians, are in the process of being established as a matter of urgency by the Commission and the World Bank.

Finally, let me repeat the firm British view that a return to negotiations represents the best way to ensure lasting peace. Negotiations are manifestly the best way to move the process forward. It is the role of the international community and the responsibility of this Council to encourage negotiations and give them the best chances of success. We cannot do that while violence continues at its current level and while one party refuses to accept the right of the other to exist.

Mr. Kitaoka (Japan): I, too, should like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Kane for her briefing.

The situation surrounding Palestine and Israel presents critical challenges at this time. All parties concerned must exercise the utmost restraint in order to avoid a further escalation of the situation.

Japan is deeply concerned over the deterioration of the situation caused by the recent acts of violence by the Palestinian extremist groups and the military operations conducted by the Israel Defense Forces, mainly in the Gaza Strip. We call on the Government of the Palestinian Authority to bring to an end the violence by the Palestinian extremist groups, including rocket attacks, and to make every possible effort to secure the immediate release of the Israeli soldier abducted on 25 June.

In that regard, Japan has been working for immediate action on that case through various examples. For example, Mr. Tatsuo Arima, Special Envoy of the Government of Japan on the Middle East Peace Process, appealed to President Abbas on 26 June to make efforts to resolve this matter.

Japan calls upon the Government of Israel, in particular, to exercise maximum restraint. We strongly urge the Israeli Government to avoid actions that cause casualties among Palestinian civilians, as well as those which bring about the destruction of civilian infrastructure, such as electric power stations, and thus directly impact the daily lives of the Palestinian population. The detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature is cause for grave concern. Japan also expresses its regret at the flight by Israeli military aircraft over Syrian territory, which can only serve to heighten the tension in the region.

Japan is deeply concerned over the negative impact which the deterioration of the situation will have on future efforts for peace. At the same time, we strongly hope that the situation will calm down and that an environment will prevail that is conducive to negotiations for peace. To that end, Japan welcomes the pledges made by Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas last week to undertake negotiations, and Japan supports the efforts made by President Abbas to advance the peace process. We also expect Israel to refrain from taking any unilateral action that might prejudge the outcome of the final status negotiations.

We are concerned about the further exacerbation of the humanitarian situation in Palestine. We reiterate at this critical juncture the importance for the international community, including Israel, to continue providing humanitarian assistance and to take necessary measures for that purpose.

One year ago, at the time of President Abbas' visit to Japan, Prime Minister Koizumi announced an assistance package of approximately $100 million for the immediate future in support of the President's peace efforts and for the well-being of the Palestinian people. About 80 per cent of the pledged amount has been disbursed to date. Japan, as one of the major donors to Palestine, will address the improvement of the humanitarian situation in an appropriate manner. It is of primary importance, however, for the Israeli Government fully to resume the transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority in order to improve the fiscal and humanitarian situations in Palestine.

In conclusion, we announced last Wednesday that Prime Minister Koizumi will be making a visit to Israel, Palestine and Jordan just prior to the forthcoming Group of 8 summit meeting, if the situation permits. During his visit, he will hold talks with his counterparts to seek ways for the advancement of the Middle East peace process through negotiation,

and encourage the relevant leaders to take a proactive role in that endeavour.

Mrs. Taj (United Republic of Tanzania): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for her update on the situation in the Middle East.

Like other delegations, we are deeply troubled by the recent developments in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. The upsurge of violence in the past three days, sparked by the abduction of an Israeli soldier by the military wing of Hamas, is deeply regrettable. It is clear that the Israeli incursion into Gaza over the kidnapping of the soldier is aimed at persuading the Palestinians to give him up. Israel has a right to defend its people, but instead of engaging in such a broad military action, it should have given dialogue a chance. The outcome of the incursion in search of the kidnapped solider is hurting the Palestinian civilian population disproportionately.

As a result of the Israeli action, a large of part of overpopulated Gaza is without water, electricity and fuel — a situation likely to lead to a humanitarian disaster of unimaginable proportions. That is above and beyond the difficulties that the Palestinians are already experiencing on account of unpaid salaries and the refusal to transfer funds to pay for basic social services.

We call for the immediate cessation of hostilities and for dialogue to replace military action. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt to try to find a solution to the current crisis.

In this very complicated political and military situation, we urge both sides to exercise maximum restraint. The use of force cannot provide a solution to this problem; on the contrary, it will aggravate it. To de-escalate the tension, Hamas should release the Israeli soldier. For its part, Israel should realize that military pressure only ends in counter-violence from the Palestinian side. It should therefore observe international law, exercise caution and avoid strengthening the resolve of the Hamas military wing and other military groups to continue fighting.

The arrests that Israel has made of the Hamas leadership are unjustified and can only serve to increase hostilities. We believe that their release will help to reduce tension.

Meanwhile, we appeal for international efforts to calm the situation and for action to avert a humanitarian crisis in the area.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): I would like to express the appreciation of my delegation to you, Madam President, for convening this meeting. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for her briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, where Israeli troops have carried out military operations in Gaza, including air strikes, aimed at securing the release of a soldier abducted by Palestinian militants could, if not contained, lead to more violence, with dire consequences for the Palestinian people and further damage to the prospects for the resumption of negotiations towards a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We must address the present grave situation in the Middle East with serious concern. We therefore call on the Palestinian Authority to do all in its power to secure the release of the abducted Israeli soldier. Meanwhile, Israel should cease forthwith all military operations, including air strikes, withdraw its forces from Gaza and release detained Palestinian officials. We hope that the efforts being made to achieve a negotiated solution to this crisis will bear fruit and lead to the end of yet another dark episode in the Middle East crisis.

Furthermore, my delegation wishes to reiterate its condemnation of all acts of violence. We call on the Palestinian Authority to act decisively against rocket attacks on Israel. At the same time, Israel must desist from launching future military attacks into the occupied Palestinian territory.

My delegation is very concerned about the consequences of Israeli military operations on the Palestinian people, who already find life unbearable because of the economic pressure being brought to bear on the Palestinian Authority by Israel. Ongoing Israeli air strikes have affected power supplies, and there is an acute lack of fuel in Gaza. The water supply system could also be affected. A widespread humanitarian crisis, with probable devastating consequences, could therefore be in the offing. However, the economic and institutional collapse of the occupied Palestinian territory must, of necessity, be avoided at all costs.

Israel and the Hamas Government should now move back from the brink of full-scale hostilities and seek peace, bearing in mind that that is the only way to achieve their goals. Clearly, the international community must remain actively engaged in the search for a solution to this crisis and must once more renew its commitment to the objectives of the right of Israelis to their own State within well defined and secure boundaries and equally to the right of Palestinians to their own independent State that guarantees freedom of movement for its citizens.

Mrs. Papadopoulou (Greece): I would first like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for today's briefing.

Greece fully associates itself with the statement to be made shortly by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

In the last few days, the cycle of violence in the Middle East has reached new peaks, and the situation seems to be reaching an extremely dangerous point. It was only a week ago that, during our last discussions on the developments in the region, we expressed our concern over recent incidents in Gaza and the West Bank and condemned, in the strongest terms, the violence and killings of innocent civilians, including women and children. Today we can only repeat, in sadness and horror at the further deterioration, the same condemnation and deep concern.

We cannot but deeply deplore the killing of the Israeli hostage, confirmed only yesterday, and the continued holding of an Israeli soldier as a hostage. The killing of a hostage is a barbaric act that cannot be justified and serves no purpose towards peace.

We equally deeply deplore the increasing number of victims among the civilian population in Gaza and the West Bank and the exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis. The suffering of the Palestinian civilian population has reached new alarming levels. We call upon Israel to exercise utmost restraint in dealing with the current crisis.

Let me reiterate some basic points.

We continue to believe that, in taking measures to defend itself, Israel must respect its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. In that respect, we repeat our call upon Israel for proportionate use of force.

We are particularly concerned over the detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature, and about the way it was carried out by the Israeli army. The international community has long invested in democratic institution-building as part of our shared efforts towards the creation of a viable and democratic Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. It is very important to preserve the viability and continuity of those institutions.

We also continue to believe that it is imperative that the Palestinian Government take effective and immediate strong action to improve security and to prevent terrorist attacks against Israel. We call upon them to immediately release the abducted Israeli soldier. The Hamas-led Government needs to meet and implement the principles set out by the Quartet of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of existing agreements and obligations.

In this dire situation, we welcome Prime Minister Olmert's and President Abbas's pledge to carry out negotiations, and commend the efforts of the latter to unite all Palestinian political forces to work towards achieving the widest possible consensus in support of the objectives of the road map. In that respect, the conclusion, in the last few days, of a national agreement reached by all Palestinian factions with the exception of the Islamic Jihad movement should be a step in the right direction.

Greece remains committed to striving for the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as on the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

We call upon Israel to refrain from any and all unilateral actions that could prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations and threaten the viability of a two-State solution.

At this particular critical juncture, we should not lose sight of the bigger picture, and we should not allow ourselves to become distracted from our main goal, which is to create the necessary conditions for the re-launching, as soon possible, of the peace process and the return to the road map.

Mr. Li Kexin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, we would like to thank Ms. Kane for her briefing.

We are deeply disturbed by the recent escalation of tension between Israel and Palestine. China has consistently advocated the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute through peaceful means. We oppose any military action that would cause casualties among innocent civilians. We hope that both Israel and Palestine will be able to show the utmost restraint and rationality and take immediate action to put an end to the vicious circle of violence for violence, so as to prevent a further destabilization of the situation in the region.

Every Government has the right to protect the life and security of its citizens. However, any action taken should conform to international law. Israel has resorted to unilateral force, and its action has been taken at the expense of the lives of many innocent Palestinian civilians. It has even detained democratically elected Palestinian Government officials. The international community cannot accept such actions. Israel must put an end to its operations.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority should endeavour to bring about the immediate release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier, in accordance with the interests of the Palestinian people.

China notes that the conflict tension between Israel and Palestine has caused many civilian casualties, thus aggravating the already fragile humanitarian situation in Palestine. Again, we appeal to Israel to respect international humanitarian law, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance by the international community to the Palestinian civilians and to avoid taking any action that would worsen the humanitarian situation in Palestine.

The recent rapid exacerbation of tension in Israel and Palestine again reminds us that the Middle East peace process should continue. Direct dialogue between the two parties should be resumed at an early date. Bloody lessons remind us that hatred and violence will not bring about peace. We urge the leadership of Palestine and Israel to proceed in the interests of their peoples, guided by the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the principle of land for peace, to restore political confidence as soon as possible and to resolve all disputes through dialogue.

It is our hope that the international community can take practical action and, in a constructive manner, help Palestine and Israel emerge from this difficult situation. The Security Council bears special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and should therefore play a more active role in that regard.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish at the outset to thank Ms. Angela Kane for the information she presented to the Council. We agree with her that we now face a grave crisis — not an ordinary crisis such as that to which, sadly, we are accustomed in the region. This meeting is occurring at a time when the security and humanitarian situation in the Middle East is deteriorating in an alarming manner. The events of recent days have the potential to destabilize the entire region. My country is extremely concerned by the situation and thus appeals to the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to take urgent measures to de-escalate the conflict in order to prevent a large-scale confrontation.

The abduction of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit by extremist Palestinian groups is an unacceptable and provocative act. We reiterate our appeal to the Palestinian Authority, immediately and without preconditions, to free him and hand him over, safe and sound, to the Israeli authorities. We also voice our concern at, and condemn, the abduction and killing of another Israeli citizen, in the West Bank, which occurred in the last few days. We believe those responsible for the death of innocent civilians should be brought to justice, as there can be no justification whatever for such acts.

Similarly, I would like to reiterate that the Palestinian Authority must take every possible measure to put an end to Qassam rocket attacks on Israeli territory launched from Gaza, in particular those that target the town of Sderot. In addition to those measures that must be taken by the Palestinian side, let us not forget that the conditions set out by the Quartet remain in force and must be complied with by the Hamas-led Government.

The Israeli Government also has significant obligations and responsibilities. Argentina is extremely concerned by the military operations being carried out in the Gaza Strip and by other Israeli activities that have affected the civilian population in the territory. The unilateral reoccupation of the Gaza Strip can only

fuel tension and violence. I believe that, as we have seen since September 2000, there can be no military solution to the conflict. We therefore believe that Israel must take a series of urgent measures to put an end to the military operations in the populated areas of Gaza. It must withdraw its troops from that territory back to their positions before the beginning of the current military campaign.

Similarly, we believe that all Israeli practices in contravention of international humanitarian law must cease, in particular those that violate the Fourth Geneva Convention. These include extrajudicial killings, destruction of infrastructure and housing and collective punishment. The detention of elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and other Palestinian Government officials is an additional cause of concern. For that reason, we call upon the Israeli Government to reconsider its decision, as it could have extremely negative repercussions — including for the Government and the people of Israel.

We share the concern of the Secretary-General and of Mr. Egeland for the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Israel must take measures to prevent suffering among the Palestinian people, in particular by facilitating access for food, medical supplies and fuel. Similarly, measures must be taken to restore the supply of basic services such as electricity, on which the water supply and sanitation system for large parts of the population depend.

At the regional level, we feel it is imperative to put an end to all acts of provocation, of which there are many. All countries in the region must contribute to resolve the crisis. They must refrain from taking measures that would increase tension and must respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their neighbours. We cannot fail to stress the necessity of avoiding any confrontation that could have destabilizing repercussions for the entire Middle East.

Throughout this process, the international community and the Security Council have a significant role to play. We cannot and must not remain indifferent when confronted by the renewed cycle of violence, reprisals and revenge. In this difficult situation, we hope the Security Council will remain cohesive and that it will send a clear and unambiguous message to all parties, emphasizing that the only way to a solution to the Middle East conflict is through good-faith negotiations based upon the resolutions adopted by the Council, the Madrid terms of reference, earlier agreements and the principle of land for peace.

Mr. De Rivero (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for the valuable information she shared with us.

My delegation regrets the escalation of armed violence between Israel and the Hamas-led Government of the Palestinian Authority. We condemn the unnecessary and provocative military operation, for which Hamas was responsible: the attack, through a tunnel, on an Israeli military post, in which two members of the Israeli armed forces were killed and a third abducted. We call for the immediate and unconditional freeing of the Israeli soldier. We also condemn the kidnapping and killing of another Israeli citizen in the West Bank and the constant firing of Qassam rockets.

At the same time, we call upon Israel to cease its attacks in Gaza, in particular against infrastructure such as power stations. Such attacks jeopardize water and food supplies and could cause a critical humanitarian situation, as Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, recently stated. Similarly, my delegation agrees with what the Group of Eight, meeting in Moscow, has said. Additionally, we express our concern about the detention of elected officials of the Palestinian Authority.

We agree that it is urgent for the Quartet, at the highest level, to act resolutely to bring about a permanent ceasefire and to ensure that the kidnapped Israeli soldier is returned and that detained Palestinian Authority officials are freed. We call upon both sides to end the violence, but we insist that Hamas accept the call by the Quartet and the Security Council that it recognize Israel, end acts of violence and abide by obligations previously undertaken by the Palestinian Authority.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Denmark.

Let me start by joining others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane for her update on the situation in the Middle East. Furthermore, Denmark fully associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

Like other delegations, Denmark is deeply concerned about the current deterioration of the security situation in the Middle East. In particular, we are concerned at the situation on the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel following the attack by militant Palestinians, the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit of the Israel Defense Forces and the killing of a young Israeli settler. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit and urge the Palestinian leadership to undertake all necessary efforts in that regard.

We also call on Israel to exercise utmost restraint in the current crisis. The detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature gives rise to particular concern.

All parties must do their utmost to avoid further escalation. The parties should not let themselves be provoked further. Additional violence will only serve to promote the agendas of extremists. Hopes for a resumption of political dialogue after the recent positive signals, including the meeting between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, must not be dashed.

As set out by the Quartet, the Hamas-led Palestinian Government needs to meet and implement the three principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of existing agreements and obligations.

In view of the urgent need to re-launch the process towards a negotiated two-State solution which would bring peace to both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples, we call for early engagement between the Israeli Prime Minister and the President of the Palestinian Authority. We reiterate our expectation that both parties will respect existing agreements and obligations, including the road map.

Moreover, we call on the Palestinian Government to bring terrorist violence to an end. We condemn the extremist groups responsible for these acts and all those who jeopardize the prospects for peace.

Finally, we call on all parties to protect all civilians and not to add to their suffering. We urge them to assume once again their full responsibility to restore security, allowing for the resumption of the peace process and for a return to the road map.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is an honour and a privilege for me, Madam President, on behalf of the Group of Arab States at the United Nations, to commend you for the manner in which you are guiding the work of the Council this month and to thank you for your prompt response to the call for the convening of this meeting.

The Arab Group called for this emergency meeting because of the grave developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel, the occupying Power, continues to enjoy full impunity and has, in its habitual manner, carried out aggression in the West Bank and launched an incursion into Gaza, employing its full military might, targeting innocent Palestinian civilians. It has detained a number of cabinet ministers of the elected Palestinian Government as well as legislators, in violation of all relevant rules and norms of international law. This sets a most dangerous precedent.

Israel has destroyed vital infrastructure such as power and water stations, thus further complicating the lives of 1.5 million Palestinian civilians, who were already the victims of the collective punishment meted out by the occupation authorities. It is leading the area into a cycle of violence.

In an expansion of its aggression, Israel has violated the sovereign airspace of the Syrian Arab Republic, thus posing a threat to international peace and security and to the security of the region. We vigorously condemn these policies.

This aggression may be added to the long list of acts of aggression against the Palestinian people and violations of their fundamental human rights that Israel has been committing for decades. All of these countless illegal and illegitimate Israeli practices violate international humanitarian law and numerous resolutions adopted since 1967 by the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The aggression — which Israel launched on the flimsiest of pretexts — is aimed at destroying all diplomatic efforts to ease tension. Indeed, it is a classic example of the State terrorism that Israel pursues. More than ever before, the international community is thus called upon to work at all levels to halt policies of double standards and to endeavour to put an end to this aggression.

The Security Council must compel Israel to withdraw immediately from Gaza and all the other occupied territories and to cease all military operations. The Council should also provide international protection to the Palestinian people, in conformity with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 1949, and relevant international law. It should ensure that the Government of Israel, as the occupying Power, assumes full responsibility for the safety of detainees and abductees in Israeli prisons and should demand the immediate release of the detained Palestinian ministers and legislators.

The Quartet, being the guardian of the road map, should assume its responsibilities and seek a decisive and just position in order to put an end to the continuous Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and to expedite the operation of the assistance mechanism that has been approved, and not to delay its implementation in view of the tragic conditions that the Palestinian people are facing.

It is well known that the root cause of the problem is the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the policies of blockade that are being imposed on the Palestinian people. The just and comprehensive peace to which the people of the region aspire is a whole that can never be realized without a total withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, the Syrian Golan and the Shab'a Farms, and without a return to the 4 June 1967 borders.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Araghchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Madam President, I wish to begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the Council presidency for the month of June. I congratulate Ambassador Ikouebe of the Congo and the Congolese delegation for their able stewardship of the Council in May. I also thank you, Madam President, for convening this open meeting on an issue which truly threatens international peace and security.

Once more, the international community is witnessing yet another military invasion by the Zionist army against the innocent Palestinian people, which goes on in flagrant defiance of the most basic principles of international law and the fundamental provisions of the United Nations Charter.

Warplanes, tanks and thousands of troops, invading the Gaza Strip, have targeted civilians and purely civilian infrastructures, destroying three main bridges, disabling the only power plant, making main roads impassable and bombarding the Strip with heavy artillery fire and fire from the air. The aggressors are thus depriving the civilians of basic necessities and, by severely damaging the water supply system, raising the spectre of epidemics and health disasters.

With the Palestinian economy already strangulated under an unjust embargo since January and the Palestinians remaining under siege even after the occupiers' withdrawal from Gaza, the new aggression threatens to inflict further enormous suffering on civilians and exacerbates the situation within the Palestinian territory and in the region.

Given the situation in the occupied territory, the excuse invoked by the invaders to justify the enormous suffering that is being inflicted upon Palestinian civilians is devoid of any ground and plausibility. Nothing could justify the acts perpetrated by the invading army, which run grossly counter to the basic tenets of international law. Likewise, it should not be overlooked that thousands of Palestinians, including many women and children, are unjustifiably suffering in the occupiers' jails for extended periods of time.

There should be no doubt that the new round of aggression pursues more important political and strategic objectives, which include the undermining of the democratically elected Palestinian Government. The abduction and illegal detention of dozens of Palestinian cabinet ministers and members of the Palestinian parliament who took office as a result of a free and fair election clearly attests to this fact. It is ironic that those who claim to be seeking to promote democracy in the region are now looking approvingly upon this ongoing repression.

It is depressing that the occupying forces and the United States as their main supporter have continuously failed to learn from their historic blunder. After more than fifty years they still hope to force the Palestinian people into submission by employing means such as those being currently resorted to in the occupied territory. It is very unfortunate that they fail to understand that only the restoration of justice could remedy the grievances and lead to the reinstatement of

peace and normalcy in the region. Neither, apparently, do they understand that the oppression they impose upon a whole nation is one of the root causes of many global problems with which the international community is grappling.

We are also concerned over the implications of the new aggression for the whole region. Violating Syria's airspace and threatens to hit targets inside that country are equally disturbing. The new aggressive posture stands to create more instability and tension and threatens to further destabilize the situation in the region. Thus the crisis, if unchecked, may tip towards escalation and engulf the whole region.

While strongly condemning this latest Zionist criminal act, we believe that aggression that targets civilians and civilian infrastructures is both an act of collective punishment and war crimes in defiance of international humanitarian law. Thus it is imperative that the international community get involved in an effective manner and prevent the continuation of those terrorist designs against the Palestinians.

The impunity with which the Zionists have been allowed to carry out their crimes has undoubtedly emboldened them to continue on the same path. Therefore it is high time for the international community to take effective measures to protect and enforce the most basic rights of the Palestinian people and to help put an end to the vicious cycle of violence brought about by the persistent illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. We believe that an end to the occupation, the formation of a Palestinian State with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital and the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland is the only solution to the enduring Palestinian crisis.

This Council has an important role to play in this regard and should act with a view to preventing the occupying regime from continuing to flout the will of the international community, incorporated in numerous resolutions of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Conference. As the ongoing aggression seriously threatens international peace and security, the Security Council has an enormous responsibility under the United Nations Charter to take necessary and prompt steps with a view to putting an end to the aggression.

It is very unfortunate — in fact, distressing — that the United States has not been able to fulfil its responsibility and obligations in this regard, particularly as a permanent member of the Security Council. The United States, by use of its veto right, has continuously prevented this Council from acting effectively to protect the Palestinian people.

We hope that, recognizing the need to take decisive action in the face of this new escalation in the region, all members of the Council will live up to their responsibilities in properly addressing the grave situation created in the wake of the latest aggression.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, allow me to begin by thanking the Assistant Secretary-General, Ms. Angela Kane, for her briefing and to express my appreciation of and support for the statement made by the delegate of Algeria on behalf of the Arab Group and the statements to be made by Zimbabwe on behalf of the African Group and by Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Security Council meets today as the occupied Palestinian territories are witnessing grave escalation by Israeli military forces. That escalation threatens to widen the scope of violence and counter-violence and diminishes the prospects for security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. This escalation undermines the peace process, in whose success we all have a stake and which is aimed at the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side with the State of Israel.

In recent days, Israel has been carrying out a succession of military attacks against the Palestinian people, killing many civilians, in particular children. Those attacks escalated to the full-scale operation that Israel launched two days ago against the Palestinian territories, in particular the Gaza Strip, from which it had recently unilaterally withdrawn. Infrastructure has been targeted, including power plants, bridges and water pipelines, thereby threatening humanitarian tragedy for more than 1.5 million Palestinian citizens in Gaza. The occupation force did not stop there. It has detained many Palestinian officials, including cabinet members and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, who were elected an electoral process that was certified by the international community as being fair.

In legal terms, these attacks can only be viewed as a flagrant violation by Israel of international law and

international humanitarian law. The Security Council must therefore do everything possible to provide the Palestinians with international protection, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 1949. Israel, as the occupying Power, must be held responsible for its actions.

The current situation requires that the Security Council assume its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security. It must take immediate measures to stop the situation from deteriorating further, as that could widen the scope of the conflict regionally, especially given that Israeli has begun to provoke neighbouring Arab countries, in particular Syria, thereby risking an expansion of the confrontation.

Egypt therefore believes that we must take immediate steps to defuse the tension. First, the Israeli and Palestinian parties should adopt mutual measures to calm the situation and return it to the status quo ante. Secondly, Israeli must immediately withdraw from the territories that it entered in the Gaza Strip and put an end to its military operations in all of the occupied Palestinian territories. It must release the Palestinian officials that it has detained and make a commitment not to commit acts of aggression against civilians in future.

Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority must commit itself to making every effort to guarantee the immediate release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier and to put an end to the launching of missiles into Israel, provided that Israeli ends its military operations and withdraws its forces from Gaza.

Fourthly, the Quartet should undertake immediate measures to build confidence between the two sides in preparation for final status negotiations on the basis of the terms of reference of the peace process, the principle of land for peace, the Oslo Agreement, the Sharm el-Sheikh understanding, the road map and all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

The Arab peoples have truly lost patience with the international community's failure to confront repeated violations by Israel, which it commits with impunity. We have had enough of the double standards that are applied in this situation, whereby a Palestinian person and an Israeli person are not given equal value. Our crises and tragedies do not arouse any interest. Some would promote Israel's right to self-defence even if it leads Israel to renege on all of its international commitments, to reoccupy parts of the Gaza Strip and to violate the most basic human rights of the Palestinian people. Those rights are guaranteed by international law, and we are all working to enhance the role of the United Nations and its ability to guarantee respect for human rights, which all people should be able to enjoy.

The Security Council, the Quartet and every State member of the Security Council must understand that the solution consists in an end to the occupation, the achievement of stability and the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, through negotiations. That is the basis of the Arab peace initiative, launched in 2002. That initiative remains the only realistic basis for a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and the countries aligning themselves with this statement.

The European Union is extremely concerned about the situation which has evolved in recent days between Israel and the Palestinians, and it calls on all parties to abstain from any actions that are in violation of international law. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier. The European Union strongly condemns the murder of the Israeli victim of a kidnapping in the West Bank. We call on the Palestinian leadership to put an end to violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets at Israeli territory.

We express our particular concern about the detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature. Those detained should be accorded their full legal rights. The European Union reminds all parties of their responsibility to protect civilian lives. Notwithstanding Israel's legitimate right of self-defence, ongoing military operations should be in accordance with international law. We call on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint and to avoid disproportionate action. We regret the destruction of essential infrastructure, which is contributing to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Restoring electricity and water supplies and access for humanitarian organizations must be a priority now in order to avoid a humanitarian crisis.

The European Union emphasizes the primacy of diplomatic means and calls upon all parties in the region to make every effort possible to resolve the current situation by peaceful means. We reaffirm our conviction that only a negotiated two State solution can bring peace and security to the Israeli and Palestinian people. A return to the peace process and to the implementation of the road map is therefore imperative. We ask that both parties meet their responsibilities and demonstrate urgently an active commitment to the search for a negotiated solution.

On 15 June, our heads of State or Government endorsed a proposed temporary international mechanism to channel assistance directly to the Palestinian people, which has been drawn up by the European Commission following consultations within the EU, as well as with Quartet members, major donors, international financial institutions and partners in the region. The European Union, through the European Commission, will continue urgently to establish the mechanism, in conjunction with Quartet members, other key international partners and the Palestinian Authority President's Office.

We agree that, in order to have an immediate impact, the mechanism will focus on essential supplies and running costs for social services and health case, supply of utilities, including fuel, and social allowances. Other donors, including Arab States, are invited to provide funding and to consider early and substantial contributions. The European Union will contribute a substantial amount to the international mechanism.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Rahman (Malaysia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Non-Aligned Movement believes that the Palestinian question, including East Jerusalem, continues to have fundamental importance for peace and security in the Middle East and in the world at large. The Movement remains committed to a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Further, it remains supportive of the Palestinian people in exercising their inalienable right to self-determination for an independent and sovereign State with East Jerusalem as its capital and for their freedom and dignity. The Movement reaffirms its support for the Middle East peace process, based on the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative, the illegality of any territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force, and the road map.

The Non-Aligned Movement is gravely concerned about the current, deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip, which has escalated in the past few days. We condemn the kidnapping and detention by Israel of Palestinian cabinet ministers, members of the Legislative Council and other officials. At the same time, we condemn the kidnapping and detention by Palestinian militants of an Israeli soldier. We strongly condemn the killings — including the extrajudicial killings — and wounding of civilians as a result of recent events. Further, we strongly condemn the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel against the Palestinians and acts of violence and terrorism carried out by Palestinian militants against Israeli civilians.

In the light of the current situation in the region, the Movement urges Israel in particular to exercise maximum restraint and to ensure respect for its obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. The Movement further urges both sides to take all necessary measures to stop the vicious circle of violence, which has caused a great number of casualties and a great amount of destruction to public infrastructure and property.

The release by both sides of all recently kidnapped and detained individuals is a crucial first step to de-escalate the worsening situation in the region. The kidnapping and counter-kidnapping of officials must be checked lest it become a dangerous trend in the future that would be difficult to deal with.

In that connection, the Non-Aligned Movement urges the Security Council, bearing in mind its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, to immediately intervene by demanding that both sides release all recently kidnapped and detained individuals and by compelling Israel to, inter alia, cease its campaign of aggression in the Gaza Strip, abide by its obligations under international law and immediately cease its military attacks against Palestinian civilians and its destruction of civilian property and infrastructure. The Council should support and assist efforts by President

Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority to prevail upon groups in its territories to halt all rocket attacks against Israel and attacks against Israeli civilians. The Movement urges both sides to act in conformity with international law and to refrain from taking steps that could further escalate the violence and aggravate the already tense situation in the region.

It is incumbent upon both Israel and Palestine, in their own interest and with the assistance of the international community, to create the conditions necessary for a resumption of negotiations to seek a just, durable and comprehensive final settlement. That entails, in particular, denouncing violent measures and acts of terrorism and revoking unilateral actions by Israel that could further undermine peace and stability in the region. In that context, the Movement is confident that the Quartet will continue to intensify its efforts to achieve the full and honest implementation of the road map.

The Non-Aligned Movement stresses the necessity of upholding international law and the Charter of the United Nations with regard to the question of Palestine. The Movement further stresses the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects. The Council is in a position to prevail upon Israel and Palestine to be fully committed to a just, lasting and comprehensive final settlement. The Council bears the primary responsibility for ensuring that they move in that direction. As the Movement has stated in the past, the Council must not be reluctant to invoke its authority and power, especially on this question, for the sake of establishing peace for the Palestinians and the Israelis, for the sake of the people in the region and to serve and meet the collective interest and desire of our global family of nations.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Zoubi (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Permit me at the outset to congratulate you, Madam, on your leadership of the Security Council during this month and to thank your predecessor for his guidance of the work of the Council last month.

We condemn Israel's insistence on pursuing its vast military operations against Palestinian civilians; those operations are totally unjustified. We also condemn the collective punishment imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people in Gaza. We condemn violence and the killing of civilians anywhere. The recent developments are extremely unfortunate and do not serve peace and stability in the region.

We had hoped that all the parties — particularly the Israeli party — would display a high level of restraint, because we all know the political difficulties and security challenges in the region in general. What the Israeli occupation forces are doing in Gaza after their unilateral withdrawal only weakens the chances for the success of the political process and heightens the atmosphere of violence and extremism.

Today we hope that the Security Council will send a strong and clear message that this unproductive and negative situation, brought about by irresponsible measures, must cease. Our efforts must focus on de-escalation, the creation of trust between the two parties and the immediate implementation of the road map. A failure by the Council to send that message and to turn the parties in the right direction will not stop the deterioration of the situation or save the worsening political process caused by the tensions and the delays in efforts to put an end to the current deadlock. The international community's responsibility is paramount in the implementation of the road map. I wish to recall that the Government of Jordan is making every effort to put an end to this dangerous escalation.

We call upon the Palestinian and Israeli parties to respect all the agreements signed, as well as the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement, and to cease all measures of escalation, whether they be rocket firings, incursions, arrests or kidnappings. We call upon both parties to focus on the political process.

We look forward with great interest to the outcome of the Palestinian investigation into the prisoners' document and of the reconciliation dialogue. We call upon all Palestinian parties to serve the high interest of the Palestinian people. We would like to commend the sincere efforts of President Abbas to activate the political process. We welcome the positive measures taken by both parties, such as the meeting held at Petra in March during the meeting of Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

We call on Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to all practices that violate the human rights of the Palestinian people and to occupation measures such as permanent restrictions on, and military action against, the Palestinian people; ongoing colonization; and the

building of the separation wall. Indeed, all of those actions, which have been condemned, prevent the Palestinian Authority from respecting and fulfilling its commitments under the road map, especially in the difficult political context that prevails in the occupied Palestinian territories, as they have created a humanitarian crisis and threaten to create a security crisis as well. We call for a speedy reactivation of the mechanism by the Quartet through cooperation with the Palestinian Authority.

A settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will require an end to Israeli occupation and must be based on the principles of international legality and an agreed solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees, based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We must demonstrate political will and work to put an end to this escalation and resume negotiations. Unilateral solutions will never produce a lasting peace between the two peoples.

The President: The next speaker on my list is the representative of Yemen, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate you on presiding over the work of the Council for this month. Given our friendship, we are fully aware of your wisdom, and we know that you are a person of vision. Allow me also to express our gratitude and appreciation to your predecessor, the Ambassador of Congo, for the manner in which he conducted the work of the Council during the month of May.

We would like to endorse the statement made by the representative of Algeria, who spoke on behalf of the Arab Group, and the statement made by the representative of Malaysia, who spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

To those I would like to add the following.

The Security Council is meeting once again to put an end to the arrogance of Israeli might. The Council knows full well that this is not the first time that the forces of the Israeli occupation have practiced State violence against a defenceless people. Israel has bombed densely populated cities and refugee camps — refugees it has displaced from their lands.

What is new here is that the Israeli forces have taken their acts of aggression to new heights by killing innocent civilians on the Gaza shore, destroying Palestinian infrastructure, kidnapping Cabinet ministers and Palestinian officials, and intensifying the scale of its aggression by sending its warplanes to violate the airspace of the Syrian Arab Republic, with a view to destabilizing the region and pushing it into a state of war — as if our region was lacking in tragedy.

The Republic of Yemen condemns the acts of aggression committed against the occupied Palestinian territories. It condemns also the violation by Israeli warplanes of Syrian airspace and requests that an end be put to such acts of aggression, that the Israeli forces withdraw to their previous positions, and that the Cabinet ministers and Palestinian officials who were detained be released, as they were elected in free and democratic elections. We call once again for respect for the inviolability of Syrian airspace.

It is strange indeed that these Israeli acts of aggression follow on the heels of the Palestinian national reconciliation movement, aimed at allowing Palestinians to speak with one voice and responding to the internationally agreed provisions related to the peace process in the region. It has become clear that the military actions and threats began prior to the detention of the Israeli soldier, which has been used by Israel as a pretext for its acts of aggression. This shows that Israel does not really seek peace. Perhaps it cannot live without triggering disputes and conflicts in the region as a justification for usurping and annexing additional Palestinian territory so as to establish settlements there, bringing settlers from all parts of the world.

Israel persists in this behaviour because it knows full well that the international community, and the Security Council in particular, are paralysed. Not only that, it enjoys protection from punishment. No one even questions what it does or its actions, which run counter to international law and to divine codes.

We would like to stress once again that, in order to achieve peace and stability, pressure must be brought to bear on Israel to respect international instruments. Israel should be stopped. It cannot continue to act as if it were above the law. Israel's crimes generate hatred and incite violence and tension in the region.

We are convinced that any defenceless people subjected to intermittent acts of aggression would definitely feel frustrated and hopeless. Frustration generates hatred and terror. Terror feeds on an

environment in which there is no justice or fairness. The international community must therefore put an end to Israel's acts of aggression and hold Israel accountable. It also should work to speedily implement final status negotiations in accordance with internationally binding resolutions, the decisions of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President: The next speaker on my list is the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Atieh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, my delegation appreciates your prompt response in convening this meeting of the Security Council on an important and delicate issue that has been on the Council's agenda for decades, without any real enthusiasm ever having been shown to resolve it.

The Security Council is meeting today as the dangerous situation in the Middle East deteriorates from bad to worse as a result of arrogant Israeli practices that know no limits because of the lack of any moral, humanitarian or international deterrence to its practices, which constitute a real threat to international peace and security.

Israel, which has never abided by internationally binding resolutions, is trying to drag the whole region into a cycle of violence by expanding the scope of its aggression in the Middle East. The fact that Israeli warplanes penetrated Syrian airspace is a blatant violation of the sovereignty of an independent State and an unjustified provocation to that State, as well as a flagrant violation of international law. Moreover, Israel's sweeping aggression against the Palestinian Gaza Strip and West Bank is a war crime for which it should be held to account, in conformity with international law. Such acts of aggression represent an unacceptable and unjustifiable provocation and direct hostility for purposes and reasons that are well known. They reflect Israel's internal failures and its efforts to export its problems and to shirk the prerequisites of a just and comprehensive peace, in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations.

The events of the past few hours have shown that Israel's intentions in withdrawing from the Gaza Strip were never genuine or sincere. Israel has only been waiting for an excuse to re-invade Gaza and to pursue its aggressive policies against the Palestinian people. The destruction of Palestinian infrastructure that provides for the basic needs of the people of the Gaza Strip is a violation of international humanitarian law, and more specifically of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War.

Israel's exacerbation of the situation throughout the area is compounded by its attempts to provoke Syria. Worse than its daily violation of international law, international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions concerning the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel has no qualms about levelling charges and allegations against other parties as a smokescreen for the war crimes it perpetrates every day against an unarmed population.

Our past experience with the Security Council is a cause of concern, given the Council's repeated failure to assume its responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security in the Middle East, a very important and sensitive part of the world. The question here is: Why does the situation in the Middle East continue to deteriorate in a cycle of violence? The answer is to be found in the ongoing Israeli occupation and aggression, as well as in the Council's being prevented from taking up its mandate and a lack of earnest in the search for a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It is our hope that the Security Council will today be able to assume its responsibilities for the humanitarian catastrophe being imposed on the Palestinian people as a result of the destruction of their infrastructure through the bombing of their water supplies, electric power stations and bridges. The international community expects the Security Council to take a firm stance against the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, in conformity with its Charter mandate to maintain international peace and security.

In his statement today, the Ambassador of the United States attacked my country in a most unacceptable manner, making baseless allegations and presenting himself as a defender of Israel's aggression against the Palestinian people. The representative of the United States is the last person who can claim the right to make such allegations, especially since the policies of the United States, which are biased towards Israel and distort the facts, support extremism and terrorism throughout the world. The United States provides cover for Israel in the Security Council as it

pursues its aggressive and destructive policies against the Palestinian people. That will never serve the cause of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. It will lead only to further tension and the deterioration of the situation there.

Moreover, the repeated allegations made by the representative of Israel against Syria and others concerning their purported sponsorship and support of terrorism are highly ironic. He merely seeks to distract us from the war crimes and terrorism perpetrated daily by his own Government against the unarmed Palestinian people. Israel's destructive military operations of recent days represent yet further evidence of the State terrorism it practices in the occupied Arab territories. Israel must be held accountable, in conformity with the provisions of international law.

Israel has displaced millions of Palestinians, who are now refugees in many countries throughout the world, including Syria, which has provided them with that which Israel has denied them. Israel has denied them their basic right to return to their homeland, which it has turned into military encampments and illegitimate settlements. It denies them even their right of self-expression and their aspirations to an independent, sovereign State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Benítez Versón (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Once again, we are witnessing the escalation of Israeli military attacks against the Palestinian people. There appears to be no end to the barbarity.

Under the pretext of the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by the Palestinian resistance to occupation, in the early hours of 28 June Israel launched a large-scale military attack on the Gaza Strip, mobilizing nearly 5,000 soldiers, hundreds of tanks and other military means. The occupying forces attacked the main power plant of the area, cutting off electricity from nearly half of the territory, indiscriminately bombing a number of bridges that connect the various sections of the Strip, re-occupying large areas in the southern part of the territory, and arresting numerous prominent individuals from the Government of the Palestinian Authority and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

That inhuman and criminal aggression was unleashed at a time when an agreement had been reached between the Palestinian political forces that would have contributed to relaunching the peace negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Cuba also vigorously rejects the violation of the airspace of the Syrian Arab Republic by Israeli military aircraft. That, together with the barbaric actions carried out against the Gaza Strip, has exposed the region yet again to a dangerous escalation of violence that endangers international peace and security. As in the past, Israel has acted with the arrogance and impunity that it derives from the economic and military support and the permanent veto power of the United States in the Security Council.

On 29 June, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba issued a statement expressing its strongest condemnation of this most recent Israeli military aggression. It called upon the international community and peace-loving forces to demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops, an end to Israel's State terrorism, respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the return of refugees, and the unconditional restoration of all Arab territories occupied in June 1967. Those steps represent the only way to achieve a fair and lasting peace for all the peoples of that stricken region.

Israel's new escalation further aggravates the already critical humanitarian situation in the illegally occupied territories, further exacerbating the financial blackmail of the Palestinian authorities and people, which is an element of political pressure to gain concessions.

The Security Council must act without delay. This body cannot remain a silent accomplice in the light of these grave developments.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming the unwavering commitment of the people and Government of Cuba to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and all Arab peoples, and by reiterating our firm belief that, sooner rather than later, the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State will become a reality.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Own: (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you,

Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We are confident that the President's experience and wisdom will enable her to make a great contribution to the promotion of international peace and security. I also cannot fail to thank her predecessor, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Congo, for wisely presiding over the work of the Council last month. I must also thank your delegation for its quick response to the request to hold this important meeting to discuss an extremely important matter that will have serious consequences for international peace and security in the region, in particular, and in the world in general.

Serious developments have arisen from the barbaric ongoing Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which culminated in the premeditated invasion and flagrant attack referred to as Operation Summer Rains — which was carried out on 28 June, targeting innocent civilians, power stations, bridges and other Palestinian Authority infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank — and from the detention of several members of the Government and of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Those acts are violations of international norms and laws, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The international community, especially the Security Council and its permanent members, should assume the moral and legal responsibility to stand up to that cowardly and shameful action. They should exercise their responsibility and denounce and condemn the premeditated and organized military campaign by the Israeli occupying forces against the unarmed Palestinian people. They should consider that aggression a crime and an act of collective punishment exemplifying international terrorism and proof positive of Israel's designs to counter any efforts at peace and a just solution of this chronic crisis.

The international community, including the Security Council, should not be fooled by the claims made by Israeli occupying forces to justify their aggression as a response to the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier or a means of self-defence. That aggression was planned and carefully considered for weeks, as confirmed by the Haaretz newspaper on its Internet web site — to the effect that the occupying army and the general security apparatus, the Shabak, had planned for weeks to detain the leaders of the Hamas movement and had sought special orders from Israeli courts under the signature of Attorney General Menachem Mazuz. That confirms that this was a premeditated act of aggression that has nothing to do with the claim of self-defence. Self-defence cannot take place in occupied territory, in which — in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights norms and practices and resolutions of international legitimacy — any intervention is a flagrant act of aggression against the rights of the Palestinian people.

The deterioration in the situation and the increasing complexity of the problems in the region are the result of Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, its enforcement of a policy of creating a fait accompli and its adoption of continued criminal practices against civilians. They are also the result of Israel's siege and collective punishment of the Palestinian people and its intimidation of certain neighbouring Arab countries. Those actions by the Israeli authorities are tantamount to piracy and are a serious violation of the inviolability of a sovereign Arab country, namely, Syria. They are also intended to provide cover for the barbaric crimes of Israeli forces in the occupied territories, and to serve as a means of reaffirming Israel's continuing policy of aggression and unjustified attacks in violation of international laws and norms.

In the face of those serious challenges and threats to international peace and security, and in the face of this organized invasion of the territory and headquarters of the Palestinian Authority, we would request the Security Council to exercise its responsibility as follows.

First, the Council should ensure adequate international protection for the Palestinian people and their legislative authority, in implementation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and other relevant international laws.

Secondly, the Council should hold the Israeli occupying authorities responsible for the safety of all detainees, prisoners of war and kidnapped persons in Israeli prisons and detention centres, and call for their immediate release.

Thirdly, the Security Council should condemn Israel's aggression against Gaza and the West Bank and put an end to it and to any violations or acts of piracy against Syrian air space.

Fourthly, the Council should call for the provision of international assistance for the Palestinian people and ensure that such aid reaches them as quickly as possible.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Jenie (Indonesia): We are assembled here this afternoon to focus on the increasingly dangerous situation in the Middle East, about which my delegation is highly concerned.

Israel has mounted a major indiscriminate offensive in Gaza. In the words of the BBC,

> "Israel's operations in Gaza and the West Bank appear to have as their aim not just an increase in pressure to get the release of its captured soldier but the weakening of the Hamas Government."

In the course of the past few days, Israel has captured cabinet ministers and taken many other democratically elected Hamas legislators. Furthermore, the Israeli air force has hit over 30 targets in the Gaza Strip so far, including the Palestinian Ministry of the Interior. Also, earlier today, one of those air strikes hit a civilian car on the main road in Gaza City, injuring two people. On the ground in southern Gaza, thousands of heavily armed Israeli soldiers have taken up positions and are primed for action.

The power supply has almost completely disappeared following the disabling of two of the remaining electrical relay stations in the blasts. The destruction of the Palestinian territory's main power transformer on Tuesday had already left hundreds of thousands of people without electricity and hampered the water supply, thereby pushing the territory to the edge of a humanitarian crisis.

In our view, if the objective is truly to see the return of a captured soldier, this is not only aggression; it is also a grave violation of international law. The standoff between the Palestinian leadership and the Israelis is threatening to explode, and it is appropriate that the Security Council is meeting to reflect on this issue. In the interests of international peace and security it is crucial that this Council take action to prevent further deterioration of the situation. Otherwise, mistrust between the parties will increase and will make the return to peace negotiations more difficult to achieve.

Regrettably, this heavily disproportionate use of force can in no way advance the interests of peace. This heavy-handedness is about the show of brutal military force, not about getting back a captured soldier. My delegation therefore condemns it without reservation. This is particularly significant, given that the Hamas-led Government has indicated that it is considering important policy changes.

The delegation of Indonesia calls on the Security Council to act urgently to have Israel pull out of Gaza without delay and cease its military operations without preconditions. Both sides should be urged to resolve by peaceful means the issue of the kidnapped soldier, as well as the matter of the release of all recently kidnapped and detained Palestinians. My delegation makes this suggestion conscious of the fact that this is a very sensitive point on the road to peace. However, it must be remembered that the longer the current stalemate goes, the worse the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory will be. Already, the Palestinians' quality of life has been deteriorating following Israel's refusal to remit taxes collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

We call on Israel to resist the temptation to escalate the crisis. It must focus on the objective of lasting peace through the full implementation of the road map. We reiterate that there can be no military resolution of the conflict. We must repeat that only the realization of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side within secure, internationally recognized borders, as provided for in resolution 1397 (2002), can end the perpetual violence and mistrust in the occupied territories.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Maqungo (South Africa): At the outset, my delegation would like to associate itself with the statement made by Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The South African Government is deeply concerned at the recent military incursion into northern and southern Gaza and the West Bank over the past few days, resulting in the destruction of critical infrastructure. The South African Government condemns the Israeli Government's policy of collective punishment, as it constitutes a direct violation of international law.

Israel's bombing campaign on 28 June 2006, which has continued unabated, has resulted in the destruction of strategic bridges and access roads, as well as of Gaza's only power plant, causing a cut in Gaza's water supply as it operates on an electrical pumping system. In his most recent report Professor John Dugard, a United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights, has highlighted the dire state of Gaza's medical facilities. The loss of Gaza's only power plant has now resulted in a lack of electricity and water for those critical facilities, which can only exacerbate the humanitarian crisis faced by ordinary Palestinians in Gaza. Although Israel has legitimate security concerns, they should not be addressed at the expense of international law and of the human rights of the Palestinian people.

The South African Government is again calling for caution with regard to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Furthermore, the unlawful arrests of Palestinian cabinet ministers, including the Deputy Prime Minister and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, are unacceptable, and we call for the immediate release of those individuals. The South African Government calls on the Israeli Government to stop its military offensive and to take all necessary measures to ensure that this situation is not further exacerbated. The South African Government is of the view that peace can be achieved only through a negotiated settlement, based on a two-State solution that provides for a sovereign Palestinian State and guarantees the right of Israel to live within secure borders.

The military intervention and the arrests of senior Palestinian leaders come at a time when many world leaders have been interacting with the Palestinian leaders to seek the release of Gilad Shalit. They also come hours after the historic Palestinian acceptance of a plan from leaders of all Palestinian factions. That was a major step forward and opened up real possibilities of ending violence and finding a two-State solution. Given that reality, how can anyone justify the invasion, arrests and massive destruction of Palestinian infrastructure? Sadly we have entered a very dangerous period that will threaten the stability of the region and international peace and security.

The President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In accordance with the usual practice I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I now call on the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Ziade (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Madam President, I wish to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

I fully associate myself with the statements of the Arab Group and of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The occupied Palestinian territories in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank witness constant Israeli acts of aggression that target the innocent civilians and destroy infrastructure and vital economic installations of the Palestinian people. Those acts of aggression have not spared a number of Palestinian officials. The Israeli forces have arrested several cabinet ministers and members of the Palestinian Legislative Assembly.

At the same time we are hearing, yet again, Israeli claims that these military actions are just acts of self defence. Once again, Israel is going far beyond international standards of self-defence. Self-defence usually takes place in the territory of the State concerned, and not in territories under its occupation.

The Government and the people of Lebanon denounce the Israeli occupation forces' military campaign against the Palestinian people. Lebanon views this aggression as one more example of State terrorism — which is nothing new for Israel. In fact, Israel has never had any qualms about violating the sovereignty of other States, terrorizing innocent civilians, carrying out wanton acts of aggression or arresting innocent people.

Lebanon associates itself with the efforts of the Arab Group to compel the international community to take decisive steps to put an end to Israel's State terrorism against the entire Palestinian people. We

believe it is necessary to promptly take the following steps. First, the Security Council should swiftly take decisive steps to achieve a ceasefire and to restore security in the occupied Palestinian territories. It should guarantee international protection in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 1949, and other relevant instruments of international law.

Secondly, the Quartet must shoulder its political responsibilities and must accelerate the establishment of a mechanism to channel the assistance that has been pledged and to permit the distribution of humanitarian assistance.

Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority must immediately be permitted to restore the security situation, thereby enabling the Israeli and Palestinian parties to return to the negotiating table in order to deal with the current situation.

Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian territories constitute a flagrant violation of human rights, an act of aggression against the safety and security of the Palestinian people and against their right to a decent, dignified life in liberty. They also pose a challenge to the desire for peace in the region.

Israel's aggression is not confined to the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel has also heightened the readiness of its military forces along the Blue Line, again on the pretext of self-defence. Its air force has violated Syria's airspace and Israel continues to violate the airspace and territorial waters of Lebanon. Those repeated messages express Israel's aggressive intentions against the entire region. Israel continues to carry out acts of aggression against States that have consistently expressed their wish for the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Lebanon, while condemning Israel's wanton acts of aggression, joins in the call for a ceasefire, for a return to calm, for a resumption of negotiations, for the release of prisoners, and for an end to this round of bloody violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Løvald (Norway): Norway is following the dramatic situation in and around Gaza with deep concern. The situation is very serious. All parties must exercise the utmost restraint to prevent the situation from getting completely out of control. The abduction of the Israeli soldier and the killing of the young Israeli settler are unacceptable acts which we deplore. Such acts can only further aggravate the already precarious situation of Palestinian civilians.

We deeply deplore the arrest of lawfully elected Palestinian politicians. They need to be released immediately. Norway has repeatedly condemned Qassam rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel. Israeli military operations in that densely populated area are endangering lives and causing suffering to the civilian population in Gaza. We therefore call on Israel to withdraw its forces as soon as possible. Norway is also deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza caused by Israeli attacks on vital infrastructure. Such collective punishment is unacceptable.

The current operations raise a number of issues of international law, whether they are police operations or military operations. According to international law, any use of violence shall be necessary and proportionate. Any countermeasures against the civilian population are unacceptable under international law. Israel must now help to restore water and energy supplies in Gaza, desist from any action that might damage vital infrastructure and show consideration for the Palestinian civilian population. Palestinian leaders have to make every effort to release the kidnapped Israeli soldier and bring to justice those responsible for the murder of the other Israeli citizen.

Norway urges the parties to show the greatest possible restraint and allow time for negotiations so that a peaceful solution to this serious situation can be found.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Sahel (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset, Madam President, to express to you and to the other members of the Council our thanks and appreciation for your prompt response to the Arab Group's request to convene an emergency meeting of the Security Council to consider the new escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories. I also take this opportunity to thank Ms. Angela Kane for her presentation at the start of today's meeting.

My country is following with grave concern the serious situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the developments of the past few days. In the face

of the wave of destruction that has reached the institutions of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian infrastructure, the Government of Morocco cannot fail to deplore the escalation, the violence and the campaign carried out by the occupation authorities. Morocco calls for an immediate cessation of the intervention by the Israeli army.

The Israeli policy of escalation only further complicates the crisis with its targeting of Palestinian Authority officials and the arrest of cabinet ministers and other officials. We call for the release of all Palestinian officials arrested by the Israeli army and reiterate the need to put an immediate end to the violent campaign in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Kingdom of Morocco rejects completely Israel's dire approach to dealing with the crisis through a military escalation of the situation at the very time that the Palestinian factions had reached a political agreement that would facilitate the resumption of the peace process. While we recall that there is no alternative to dialogue, we reiterate that the Palestinian Authority President, cabinet ministers and Legislative Council members must be able to move freely within the territories of the Authority in order to facilitate political action.

Israeli provocations through violations of Syrian airspace portend a continuation of the cycle of violence and counter-violence. It constitutes a grave threat to international stability and security. In that context, Morocco calls upon the Security Council and the Quartet to take concrete measures to put an end to the Israeli operations against the occupied Palestinian territories and to bring about the withdrawal of the Israeli forces without delay, in order to return to the political process.

The Kingdom of Morocco continues to be hopeful, despite these difficult circumstances, that there is a possibility of reaching an end to violence in the region. The Government of Morocco is firmly convinced that negotiations are the best way to establish a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the road map.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Chidyausiku (Zimbabwe): Madam President, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the Council on behalf of the African Group on the topical subject of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. May I also commend the delegations of Algeria, in its capacity as Chair of the Group of Arab States, and of Qatar, for their timely call for this debate to bring the urgent attention and focus of the Council, and indeed the larger international community, on the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Middle East.

The Group of African States wishes to join others in expressing its deep concern over the escalating tensions in the Middle East, which have seen Israeli military invasions of the Gaza Strip and the resulting wanton destruction of Government buildings, roads, bridges and power stations, the illegal arrest of elected representatives and threats to the lives of defenceless Palestinian civilians, including women and children.

The Group of African States sees this unfortunate development as a result of the lack of progress in addressing the major issues and in following up on core positions regarding the question of Palestine. The African Group condemns the ongoing excessive use of military might by Israel, which is disproportionate to the issues at hand, and demands that Israel immediately cease all violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

The African Group wishes to call on the Security Council to take urgent measures to bring the ongoing Israeli military invasion to an immediate halt in order to advance the peace process in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Chaudhry (Pakistan): Madam President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on steering the presidency of the Council for the month of June and for convening this important debate on the last day of your presidency.

Since the last public meeting in the Council on the situation of the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, definitive changes have taken place in the region. The recent surge of violence ensued after the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier on 25 June, and the massive military operation by the Israeli army that followed has seriously undermined the atmosphere of hope for peace that was built after

the elections in the Palestinian Authority and in Israel. This deadly violence has grave implications.

Pakistan regrets the Israeli incursion into Gaza, the total blockade of the Gaza Strip and the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure. We are concerned over the escalation of hostilities between Israel and Palestine that would further impede the international efforts to stop the cycle of violence and restart negotiations. Pakistan hopes that the international community will take the necessary steps to help resolve the crisis through peaceful means.

The challenge before the international community is three-fold: first, how to halt the present phase of massive human sufferings and chaos resulting from the military operations of Israeli army; secondly, how to maintain peace between Israel and Palestinians and resume negotiations for the lasting solution to the problem of the Middle East; and thirdly, how to prevent actions being taken by Israel that could unilaterally create realities, making a negotiated settlement based on the principle of land for peace completely impossible.

Indeed, there are no ready answers to these complex questions. Yet the United Nations, including the Security Council and the Secretary-General, must now play the central role in responding to these challenges. It is the moral obligation of the international community to call upon the two Governments to heed the call of their peoples and work constructively towards the attainment of peace.

In the context of the situation on the ground, I would like to make the following essential points. First, there should be an immediate cessation of hostilities with a view to finding a diplomatic solution to the issue of kidnapped soldiers. Secondly, efforts should be made to resolve the present humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian areas. In the medium term, earnest efforts by Israel are essential to ensure that construction of the wall is stopped, since it not only aggravates human suffering in the Palestinian territories but also poses a mortal danger to the peace process. Moreover, Israel should make serious efforts to freeze and reverse all illegal settlement activity. Attempts to change demographics in some areas will only further complicate the final status negotiations and run counter to the goal of achieving peace. Israelis and Palestinian must deepen their dialogue and gradually move to address the final status issues. The Security Council should actively promote this process.

The implementation of the road map offers the most viable way forward towards sustainable peace. Ensuring a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and with the road map, is our collective obligation. The vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, was reflected in the Arab Peace Initiative and has been embraced by the entire international community. We must all work for the earliest possible realization of this vision.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Gahrah (Saudia Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the start I would like to associate myself with those who have congratulated you, Madam President, on your presidency of the Security Council this month. We would also like to thank you for your prompt response to the request to hold this meeting.

The delegation of Saudia Arabia would like to associate itself with Algeria and the statement it delivered on behalf of the Arab Group, and with Malaysia's, statement on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Once again, the Government of Israel reasserts its aggressive nature and continues its terrorist practices. Its aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip is a form of terrorism that must be rejected. It is totally unjustified and is clear in its aims and objectives.

The Israeli claim that the Palestinians are solely responsible for the escalation of tension in the region because of Palestinian acts of resistance against the Israeli occupation and their taking of an Israeli soldier is unacceptable. The Palestinian resistance has suffered the loss of many victims, including members of families who were merely promenading on the beach of Gaza without having committed any act of aggression against Israel. Five people in one family were killed by Israeli artillery from land and from the sea. A small child cried out to the conscience of the international community, but that cry received no response. Not even an international investigation commission was

dispatched, nor was there an explicit condemnation of that shameful act.

Israel continues to besiege the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people. It continues to isolate them, to prevent them from gaining their livelihoods. It prevents the payment of Palestinian wages. Through extermination groups called "special units", it continues its assassination of activists and Palestinian leaders. The Palestinians are only exercising their legitimate right to resist.

The Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza is a flagrant violation of international law and of agreements that have been reached. The kidnapping of Palestinian personalities — ministers and representatives — is a terrible crime and a violation of international norms, international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israeli terrorism in Gaza is not only the result of the capture of an Israeli soldier; it is part of the Israeli plan to destroy the Palestinian Government, which was legitimately, democratically and transparently elected, as witnessed by all.

The purpose of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians is to prevent them from reaching agreement among themselves, so that Israel can then claim that it has no partner for peace. The Israeli aggression lays bare the reality of the situation. Israel claims that its withdrawals are genuine; in fact, they are a deceptive attempt to keep the people who remain in the territories under siege. Israel is continuing to destroy the Palestinian infrastructure and the daily lives of the Palestinian people. It is starving the Palestinian people and depriving them of clean drinking water and the most basic living requirements so as to bring them to their knees and force them to accept the fait accompli created by a shameful and unjust occupation.

The Government of Israel would not have continued its acts of aggression if it were not for the negative stance of the international community and the failure of the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and ensure that its resolutions were implemented. The Israeli Government would not have disregarded resolutions of international legitimacy unless is knew that it could get away with its claim that it was acting in self-defence and that its acts of terrorism were legitimate and acceptable. The continuation of the tension and the violence in the occupied territories would not have continued if the road map had been implemented, the Arab initiative accepted and international resolutions implemented on the ground.

Saudi Arabia appeals to the international community, including the Security Council and the Quartet, to ensure that there is an immediate end to the Israeli aggression against Gaza and to compel Israel to withdraw its forces. They should ensure that all prisoners on both sides are released and that the provisions of international resolutions are implemented so as to ensure the establishment of a Palestinian State with Arab Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the land-for-peace initiative, and in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the road map and the Arab peace initiative.

The President: There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.50 p.m.